Fifty Years of Formal United States and European Union Relations and European Union Accession

By
Colin L. Powell,
Secretary of State

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I often remark to my audiences and my colleagues that I never thought as Secretary of State that I would be working this closely with the European Union. I am a North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) guy. I started my military career as a young second lieutenant in infantry in Germany along the Fulda Gap, and twenty-eight years later I went back to the Fulda Gap as a corps commander, and so I commanded forty troops at the Fulda Gap and I commanded 80,000 troops at the Fulda Gap.

And it was, you know, pretty consistent over that time. When I went to Germany in 1958 as a second lieutenant, they drove me up to the Fulda Gap and they said, "Lieutenant, you ever hear about the strategy of containment?" "Uh-huh, uh-huh." "Well, this is where it starts." "And you see that tree over there?" "Uh-huh." "You see that tree over there?" "Yeah, uh-huh." "Well, that's your zone, lieutenant." "And when the Russian army comes, stop it." "Do you understand?" "Uh-huh, uh-huh." I can handle that.

And twenty-eight years later when I went back, there was a tree that was a little farther to the left and farther to the right, but it was the same strategy over a twenty-eight-year period of time, even though I had not gone Vietnam for a couple years; I served in Korea. Everything was quite familiar when I got back to Germany and to the Fulda Gap. And now I have discovered that the Fulda Gap is really now a store that sells Levi's and other kinds of impedimenta. It is a tourist attraction.

And I was privileged to be part of that Administration, the Reagan Administration, and then, of course, the Bush 41 Administration. When we saw Gorbachev come along with glasnost and perestroika and we watched the end of the Soviet Union. And at that time my Russian colleagues I am now Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff would come and visit me and say, "Well, you know, the Soviet Union is over, the Warsaw Pact's gone, and therefore NATO has no further purpose, so why don't you get rid of NATO? We got rid of the Warsaw Pact, and we'll start all over with something new."

And I said, "You know, it is a great idea, I would love to do it. The only trouble is, people keep trying to join NATO and it is hard to shut down a club when people are trying to get in." So, amazing — I mean, think of it. This grand alliance that was created at the end of the 1940s to fight Soviet imperialism, Soviet attempts at hegemony over all of Europe, when it finally got into the late 1990s, it was not getting smaller in the absence of this reason for being in the first place, it was getting bigger. And who was joining? Those we had been fighting or getting ready to fight all those years.

And I have great fun with my Eastern European colleagues. The first time I ever got them all together Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania, Czech Republic, Slovak Republic all together, the Baltics, the Balkans, everybody was there, and they were in a big room in a big circle and we were all talking. And I gave my stock speech and then I listened to all these nations talk about freedom and democracy and, you know, I stared at them. And when it came back to me again I asked for the floor again and I said, "I cannot tell you how moved I am by your presentations, because just nine years ago you were all on my target list." And here we are. And amazingly this grand

alliance continues to grow. Why does it grow? Because it is connected to North America. Not only is there a European component to the expansion of NATO, but it is connected to North America. It is connected to Canada and the United States, and they want to be part of a transatlantic community.

Now, what I have discovered over the last three years is that my horizon had to expand because it is not just the twenty-six nation NATO alliance that is so important, but just as important is the European Union. We are not a member of the European Union, but I will tell you what, I spend more time with my European Union colleagues and working on issues that are in common between the United States and the European Union than I do with my NATO colleagues, even though I'm not a part of this.

Whether it is in the Quartet deliberations we had the other day, working on Middle East issues, all the other things we do, I am on the phone constantly with Javier and with Chris Patten and whoever the Presidency is that particular time.

I think that expresses once again the necessity of having strong transatlantic relations. We are a European power, a European nation just as much as we are a North American nation. We are linked in so many ways: by history, by tradition, by commerce, by shared values. And those shared values will continue to bring us closer and closer together.

I really did want an opportunity to encourage this celebration, and I hope that you enjoy yourself here because, as I think I have demonstrated, it is something I feel very, very strongly about. We are here to celebrate, really, two related accomplishments: the 50th anniversary of the establishment of an official European Commission presence here in Washington, D.C. and the historic enlargement of the European Union just six days ago.

I say related accomplishments because American support for the project of European integration, from its very beginnings, has been critical to the European Union's capacity to form, to take shape, to succeed, and now to expand. Every American President, from Harry Truman to George Bush 43, has supported Europe's great project, this grand project, and we have done it correctly and rightly, for the very best of reasons. The United States should not claim too much credit for the European Union's accomplishments because European Union expansion is, above all, a European achievement. And I know that it took an enormous amount of work by all hands to bring it about. So congratulations to all of our friends across the pond for what you have accomplished.

But no serious observer would discount the broad shaping role that the United States has played in Europe over these last five decades, not only in security but especially, I might add, and say, in the area of economics. No serious observer could imagine the European Union's May 1st expansion, except for the triumph of liberty in the Cold War, which created the conditions for such expansion. And no serious observer could begin to account for that triumph without reference for the role played by the United States.

As I mentioned, we, too, have been and will remain a European power, and we, too, have worked for the European Union's achievements. That is why the European Union's success is America's success, and that is why we Americans stand second to none in claiming our right to celebrate with you this afternoon. Actually, this celebration is an extended one, as it should be. I was fortunate to be in Brussels in November with Ambassador Schnabel, who is with us today, as we marked the 50th anniversary then of the first U.S. diplomatic representation to the European coal and steel community. And I recognize, as I look around the room, several faces from Brussels who were there in November and who have followed this rolling celebration now to Washington, D.C. And, you know, if I search hard enough, I am sure I can find enough auspicious anniversaries related to this 50-year period so you could keep having parties day after

day after day. I do not mind. I like a party. I also noticed all of you got your drinks before I showed up.

But I would be remiss if our assembly today did not connect us back to our achievements. What, after all, are we really celebrating? Full employment for diplomats? Yes. Matter of fact, yes. There is nothing wrong with that. I approve. But, clearly, we are doing more than just that. We are using particular events, some fifty years old, some just a few days old, to stand for something much broader, something much more significant. What we are really celebrating are alliances of the heart, both within Europe and between Europe and America. We are celebrating aspects of a common civilization, one whose roots go back millennia, whose expressions are gloriously diverse, yet whose deepest principles are universal. We are celebrating our confidence in the future, not just in Europe and not just in the transatlantic world but in the whole world. Above all, we are celebrating the triumph of hope. For who would have guessed in previous centuries that a continent for so many hundreds of years had been awash with blood and war would now be on the cusp of a Europe truly whole, free, and, we pray, forever at peace?

There is still a ways to go before we reach that final objective, that final goal. The European Union, we hope, is not yet finished expanding, but with this latest expansion and with unstinting American support for it, we are now past the tipping point. We will achieve that goal. We can see that Europe whole, free and at peace right ahead of us. We can almost taste it, and so can other European peoples who long to be part of this great crusade of yours. That is good for Europe, good for America. That is good for the world.

If I may, let me leave you with one last thought: Actually, not my own thought, but the thought of the man for whom this room is named, the very remarkable Benjamin Franklin. This is, perhaps, the most beautiful room in this Department and the most beautiful room, certainly, on this floor. And I hope in the course of the evening you will wander into the other rooms, all named after one of our founding fathers. This is where we have special occasions such as we have tonight. I do the Kennedy Center Honors here where I give awards to the most important artists in American life. I receive heads of state here. We have lunches for heads of state and foreign ministers. We recognize our young people who we are swearing in to the Foreign Service. I swear them in here to remind them of the history and the values that are represented in these rooms and represented in the lives of our founding fathers.

So this particular room, the best of them all, the most beautiful of them all, is named after Mr. Benjamin Franklin. During the heady days of the American Revolution, Ben Franklin pleaded above all for unity among the American colonies. "United we stand, divided we fall," he warned. "If we do not hang together," he then said, "we most certainly will hang separately." Fortunately, America heeded Mr. Franklin's advice and went on to form a more perfect union. More perfect. Not perfect yet, but getting more perfect with each passing day. Unfortunately, a later generation had to fight a terrible war to preserve that union and keep us moving down that path for the more perfect union.

Europeans, too, have fought their share of terrible battles before reaching their day of unity. We share this sobering experience in common. And that common experience in building our respective unions ought to recall Mr. Franklin's warning to all of us within the transatlantic partnership. United we, too, will stand, and stand forever. Divided we may or may not fall, but we will certainly saddle ourselves with avoidable burdens.

When Europe and America work together, there is no difficulty that cannot be overcome, no challenge that cannot be brought to heel. We do not always agree on particulars. We do agree on our common purpose in advancing human dignity the whole world over; and we do agree on our essential means to do it: Freedom above all under the rule of law.

With so much essential in common, posterity will never forgive us if we ignore Mr. Franklin's advice. But we will not ignore his advice, I am sure. And so I am prepared to predict that we are bound to celebrate our common achievements together again many times, stretched long and far into the future. But this celebration is now back in the hands of my good friend, Al Larson. I congratulate you on this celebration of a remarkable partnership, a remarkable achievement, the presence of the Commission here, for the past fifty years.